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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2028  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#) [IZ](#) [TX](#) [KZ](#)  
SUBJECT: TRANSCOM GEN MCNABB SECURES SUPPORT FOR  
AFGHANISTAN FROM AZERBAIJANI FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse, Reason 1.4. b and d.

Summary  
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¶1. (C) Commander USTRANSCOM General Duncan McNabb, USAF met Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov in Baku on November 17 to discuss GOAJ support for overland transport of supplies to U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan. The Minister responded enthusiastically to the concept, and also shared his views on Iraq - where GOAJ troops are completing five years of presence in support of OIF, and Afghanistan, where the GOAJ is planning to double its presence. The Minister also discussed Caspian maritime security and relations with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. SEPTELS report discussions with Azerbaijani President and Defense Minister, both of whom also endorsed GEN. McNabb's proposal. End Summary.

¶2. Commander USTRANSCOM General Duncan McNabb, USAF, accompanied by Ambassador Derse, met Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov in Baku on November 17. RADM Harnitchek, TRANSCOM J5/4, BG Lennon, CENTCOM Deputy J4, Ms. Kathy Casares, TRANSCOM POLAD and Mr. John Hall, DLA Executive Director for Operations and Sustainment also joined.

Northern Distribution Network  
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¶3. (C) The General explained that his primary purpose was to discuss Azerbaijan's potential as a link in a Northern Distribution Network to Afghanistan. The United States is seeking to maximize the number of available routes for sustainment items, i.e. food and construction materials, while delivering most military end items by air. In this connection, the General praised Azerbaijan's constant cooperation on overflight and refueling for U.S. air assets. The northern route would run from the Georgian port of Poti to Baku overland, thence to Turkmenistan or the Kazakh port of Aktau and overland to Afghanistan. Not all of the cargo shipped by this route will originate in the United States, the General added. Local purchases will cut the length of the supply line and the cost.

¶4. (C) Mammadyarov responded positively, especially when local purchases were raised. (Note: President Aliyev, who

met the General first, had the same reaction (septel). End note.) He noted that the GOAJ is striving to develop the non-oil sectors of its economy, especially agriculture, and thus would be very interested in the opportunity to sell fresh fruits and vegetables to be shipped along this route. Mr. Hall of DLA mentioned his interest in sending a team to Baku in early December to assess the local market for this and other purchases, and the Minister promised any necessary assistance.

#### Iraq/Afghanistan

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¶15. (C) The Minister and the General also discussed the state of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Minister feels the former is now the more difficult challenge owing to the nature of its society compared to Iraq. Azerbaijan is doubling its present 45-person military commitment to Afghanistan; and plans to undertake civilian projects like building schools and hospitals and training police in addition to security duties. A GOAJ delegation had visited Afghanistan in September to discuss needs. He also identified narcotics smuggling originating in Afghanistan as a security threat for Azerbaijan. "Almost daily," he said, the maritime border guards engage drug smugglers on the Caspian who are well armed and traveling in high-speed craft with up to four Yamaha outboards fitted to them. He also recounted that the Turkmen Foreign Minister told him two months ago that the Turkmen army had been needed to send reinforcements to law enforcement in a firefight with drug traffickers from Afghanistan.

#### Caspian Maritime Security

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¶16. (S) Following Mammadyarov's mention of the maritime fight against drug smuggling, Ambassador asked the Minister if the GOAJ could provide clarity to the United States on its maritime security priorities in light of the recent apparent eviction of the Navy staff from its headquarters in the Baku port complex (Note: In October 2008, the government ordered the eviction of the Naval Base from its current location in order to facilitate construction of a park surrounding a large flagpole being constructed at the same location. End Note.) Mammadyarov laughed, saying "You want me to get between the State Border Service and the Ministry of Defense," but said he would provide his own perspective on the matter. As part of the Ambassador's question concerned the relative roles and importance of the GOAJ Navy and Coast Guard, the Minister remarked that his preference - one, he says, that he does not like to share with MoD - is for the Coast Guard to handle dangerous situations on the Caspian because their involvement is less drastic from an international law point of view. If the Navy reacts to a maritime incident, it is an act of war; if the Coast Guard reacts, it is law enforcement in support of border security.

#### Turkmenistan/Kazakhstan

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¶17. (C) As the TRANSCOM delegation will visit Turkmenistan soon, the General asked the Minister his advice going into a meeting with President Berdimuhamedov. Again laughing, the Minister simply replied, "Enjoy." Turning serious, Mammadyarov offered the analysis that Turkmenistan is becoming more flexible in its policy. Ambassador observed that the GOTX representative at the Baku Energy Summit October 13 had unexpectedly and helpfully made public mention of a proposed trans-Caspian pipeline, and the Minister replied that "if he is smart enough," Berdimuhamedov will see that "this is the only way," comparing the idea to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline in terms of how it will expand Turkmenistan's options. Speaking of Kazakhstan, another stop on GEN McNabb's itinerary, Mammadyarov said that he eventually envisions up to 70 million barrels/year of that country's oil arriving by tanker to fill BTC. He noted the GOAJ's recent opening of a consulate in the port of Aktau as an indicator of the strengthening economic links between the

countries.

Comment

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¶18. (C) General McNabb's meeting with the Minister was highly successful on substance. The Foreign Minister, the President and the Defense Minister all agreed with the concept and pledged Azerbaijan's cooperation on the Northern Distribution Network(septels report latter conversations and next steps). In the broader context, Mammadyarov's observations on the East Caspian, particularly Turkmenistan, are intriguing. Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbor across the sea appear poised to emerge further from the stilted and idiosyncratic past; President Aliyev later told us he will visit Turkmenistan Nov. 28. We see less reason for optimism as yet in terms of the GOAJ's approach to Caspian maritime security, which remains confused. We are following up with relevant GOAJ officials to get a better fix on their current thinking of maritime security in light of the change in the Navy headquarters and will report further.

¶19. (U) General McNabb did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.  
DERSE